

VZCZCXRO1616
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHKU #0053/01 0211529
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211529Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2664
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000053

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP,

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL FOOTBALL: PM'S RIVAL EXPLOITS FIFA
SCANDAL TO GET BACK IN THE GAME

REF: A. KUWAIT 34
[B.](#) 2008 SECSTATE 135279
[C.](#) 2008 KUWAIT 1204
[D.](#) 2008 KUWAIT 934

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

Summary:

[1.](#) (C) Kuwaiti international soccer participation, recently (and temporarily) reprieved from FIFA suspension, has become the arena for proxy struggle between rivals PM Shaykh Nasser Mohammed and would-be usurper Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd, both nephews of the Amir. These two ruling family heavyweights avoid direct confrontation but continue to spar politically, in this case by gaming the Kuwaiti public's passion for soccer. The FIFA imbroglio highlights how ruling family rivalries, characteristically murky and complex, permeate Kuwaiti political dynamics at all levels, and impede progress on national agendas. It also demonstrates an intriguing use of football to create a political base that transcends traditional tribal affiliations. End Summary.

FIFA Lifts Kuwaiti Suspension

[2.](#) (C) In October 2007, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) suspended Kuwait from all international matches due to governmental interference in Kuwaiti Football Federation (KFF) elections. In October 2008, FIFA again suspended Kuwait for failure to hold KFF board elections. The suspension was (temporarily) lifted in time for January 4, 2009 Kuwaiti participation in the Oman-hosted 19th Gulf Football Tournament because of a December 2008 appeal to FIFA by the president of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee (KOC), and Amir's nephew, Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd Al-Ahmad Al Sabah. Kuwait's future status in international soccer play, conditional on the GOK revising its sports regulations and complying with FIFA bylaws, will be reviewed June 2009.

Fahd Soccer Dynasty

[3.](#) (C) Rather than serving as a symbol of national pride, Kuwaiti soccer is steeped in controversy. At the center of this turmoil is KOC president Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd, who is also the president of the National Security Bureau (NSB). Running the Kuwaiti national soccer program is viewed as a birthright for Shaykh Ahmad, whose father -- the only Kuwaiti ruling family member killed during the August 1990 Iraqi invasion -- and brother Shaykh Talal also served as KOC presidents. Shaykh Ahmad inherited KOC upon his father's death and ran the organization until his 2001 cabinet appointment as Information Minister, when he turned it over

to Shaykh Talal. Shaykh Ahmad was later transferred from this post by the current Amir Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmad (who was then PM) to that of Energy (Oil) Minister in 2003, but was removed from that position in 2006 by then and current PM Shaykh Nasser Mohammed under a cloud of corruption allegations and installed as head of the newly-created NSB, effectively a demotion.

14. (C) Through the 1990s, until his 2001 appointment as Minister of Information, Shaykh Ahmad was sovereign over Kuwaiti sports, chairing the KOC, the KFF, and the Asian Olympic Committee, exploiting these posts to develop political support from a broad base of Kuwaiti youth and sports fans.

The National Assembly Intervenes

15. (C) From 2005-2007, Shaykh Ahmad, Shaykh Talal and another brother, Shaykh Athbi, all suffered the indignity of being removed from public office, respectively as Minister of Information, KOC President and Kuwait State Security Director. Repeated losses on the international stage by Kuwait's once-winning national team also led to calls for parliamentary intervention in the running of this national obsession. Subsequent laws and amendments -- rare commodities in a time of GOK legislative dysfunction -- directly targeted the Fahd dynasty by limiting the number of sports-related positions that could be held by one official. Other laws pushed through parliament decentralized sports governance by requiring one member from each of Kuwait's existing sports clubs to serve on the KOC board. The results

KUWAIT 00000053 002 OF 002

of these actions undermined the Fahds' collective authority; the valuable leverage previously enjoyed over elections migrated to Kuwait's Football Federation.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

16. (C) In retaliation, according to current MPs Ali Al-Rashid and Marzouq Al-Ghanem in separate conversations with POLCOUNS, Shaykh Talal -- at the direction of his older brother -- went to FIFA and cried foul over governmental interference in Kuwaiti soccer. As a result of this complaint, FIFA mandated that Kuwait's National Football Federation must be comprised of only five persons. Parliament objected to this decree, and argued that it had an obligation to enforce its own law mandating a fourteen-person federation. Though MPs appeared willing to consider amending the law to bring it into line with the FIFA ruling, the contest proved to be a battle of wills between outspoken MPs and the Fahd sports dynasty, which showed little inclination to relinquish its grip on the national soccer program and its accompanying political base. In the end, Shaykh Talal's actions in reporting to FIFA on governmental intervention resulted in Kuwait's suspension -- which MPs suspect was the intended result -- and Shaykh Talal's own benching from the helm of KOC, which returned to Shaykh Ahmad.

Bend it Like Ahmad?

17. (C) In December, at the behest of the Amir, Shaykh Ahmad traveled to Japan to present FIFA Chairman Joseph Blatter a letter from the Amir which successfully appealed for Kuwait's reinstatement in time for the January tournament in Oman. Though he credited the Amir's "personal intervention" with scoring the reinstatement, it was Shaykh Ahmad -- previously denigrated by the press as part of a "triumvirate of corruption" -- who was hailed by the press as a champion upon his return. In fact, reports on Shaykh Ahmad's reinstatement victory eclipsed that of reporting on the Kuwaiti national team's performance in Oman (eliminated by Saudi Arabia in the semi-finals).

Comment:

18. (C) Shaykh Ahmad's success in getting Kuwait's suspended soccer team back on the field is only the latest in a series of maneuvers designed to move him up the political ladder. In a country that does not permit political parties, football is the perfect vehicle for expanding one's political base, transcending as it does the tribal affiliations and sectarian divides that characterize this and other traditional societies. It is very clear to parliamentary and other political observers here that this 'soccer contest' is only the latest engagement in the power struggle between Shaykh Ahmad and his cousin PM Shaykh Nasser Mohammed. End comment.

***** *
For more reporting from Embassy Kuwait, visit:
[http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable s](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable%20s)

Visit Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>
***** *
JONES